



Extended Performance Engagement: Connecting Theatres and Schools

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Introduction

This research explores and maps the field of extended performance engagement (EPE) internationally. I define EPE as the intentional deepening of the experience a young audience has before or after engaging with a live performance. This intervention took place in Galway, Ireland from Sept-Dec 2019 and used process drama to further explore themes from a performance of *My Friend Selma*, part of the Baboró International Arts Festival for Children.

Methods

This was the first of a multi-phase qualitative study that uses an Action Research methodology to investigate a drama in education intervention in a primary school classified as disadvantaged following a Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) performance. It included:

- 2 pre-performance and 7 post-performance drama sessions for fourth class students (aged 9 to 10)
- Focus groups with students
- Unique plan adapted from Imagine's *Evaluating the Performing Arts* program (2010) which included drawn responses (Reason 2013), drama exercises, and process drama in the follow-up sessions.



Preliminary Findings

Finding 1: The students were eager to know more about the story weeks later. They had many questions and reactions to the (particularly violent) elements of the story, reflecting on what they experienced emotionally.

Finding 2: The students found the journey to and from the theatre venue to be their least favorite part of the entire experience because they got wet in the rain.

Finding 3: Facilitated discussion and reflection prompts led by the classroom teacher as well as moments when the drama facilitator went into role stood out as some children's favorite aspects of the entire experience.



Discussion

The key emerging findings presented suggest that:

Finding 1: EPE provides space for young people to process and develop opinions and ideas about their experience, to learn more, and to connect to their own lives.

Finding 2: External factors such as weather have a significant impact on the way children engage with theatre and drama practices in the classroom afterward and their memory of the overall experience.

Finding 3: EPE can be used to connect story to continue exploring meaning for young people in a real-life context, but it must be prompted by a facilitator. Drama in Education conventions helped deepen this experience.



Tell us what you thought about Selma or Vicky's story:

cool, fun, interesst, scary, sad
The notes were really loud that's why
it was scary. It was interesting because
there was so many crazy things happening.
It was cool because the album was good.
And I mostly liked the story. And I
couldn't believe that it was true. I felt
sad everything that happened to
Selma. And I loved the the story
it was good.

Conclusion

The first phase of this practical intervention reveals that the TYA experience must be looked at as more than the performance alone. The trip out of school and everything that surrounds it has a strong effect on the students' experience. Both teachers and students were interested in EPE practices, but these must be facilitated and given time and space. My role as a facilitator was an important factor for connecting and deepening these children's experiences of live performance. This project contributes to research by initiating a model of drama intervention in the Irish classroom to inform our understanding of the overall landscape of EPE.

References

Evaluating the Performing Arts: a Step by Step Teaching Guide: A Support Pack to Deliver the Curriculum for Excellence. Imagine, 2010, <https://www.imagine.org.uk/schools/learning-resources/evaluating-the-performing-arts-a-step-by-step-teaching-guide/>.

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